

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AMONG UTHM STUDENTS ENGAGED IN EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Sharina, N., Hizami, A., Chan, C-M. and Md. Noor, N.

Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

Email: rhmnsharina@gmail.com,

ABSTRACT

Extra-curricular activities in higher education institutions play an important role in developing soft skills among the student. The activities are crucial in complementing the students' academic achievement and preparation for the job market upon graduation from the university. The aim of this article is to highlight the development of soft skills among UTHM students involved in extra-curricular activities, with a discourse on the advantages as well as disadvantages for such engagement among active students. A total of six (6) students active in extra-curricular activities were identified and interviewed for the study presented. The interviewee were active participants of extra-curricular activities at UTHM, i.e. Siswa Siswi Pertahanan Awam (SISPA), Pasukan Askar Simpanan (PALAPES), the Rowing Club and Oration Club. Based on the interviews, it was found that the involvement in extra-curricular activities helps students to develop soft skills, especially in terms of critical thinking, creativity and innovation. However, students lacking self-discipline and good time management skills may feel the activities to be a burden, causing tiredness and negligence during academic classes. It is therefore essential for students to first develop self-discipline when engaging in extra-curricular activities to avoid negligence of their studies and academic performance. In brief, such activities could instil a keen sense of social responsibility and readiness to volunteer in times of need among the students. Cultivation of such social awareness and voluntarism contributes to nurturing a nation of well-educated citizens with enhanced 'human touch'.

Keyword: soft skills, extra-curricular activities, human capital, social awareness, responsibilities

INTRODUCTION

The human capital development is a comprehensive process that includes knowledge and skills achievements or intellectual property that focus on entrepreneurial skills, science and technological knowledge (Ismail and Abdullah 2011). In addition, a quality human capital should be able to engage in critical and creative thinking, good in solving problems, able to create new opportunities and have the determination with ability to cope with the ever-changing global surroundings. Education is one of the main medium in order to build a successful human capital with a strong personality, knowledgeable and highly skilled that required by government towards developed nation by 2020.

According to Keow et al. (2014) soft skills are generic skills that include the cognitive elements associated with non-academic skills. Soft skills also are identified as the most critical skills and life-long learning. The need for soft skills development in higher education institution has been highlighted by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. The development of soft skill is viewed as a way to improve the quality of human capital needed by companies and a way to increase the graduates' employability in Malaysia. Therefore, the soft skills must be acquired by each student and evaluated effectively with the teaching and learning of student-centered learning skills. The seven soft elements selected from Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (MOHE) module are as follows (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006):

S1 Communication Skills (CS)

It is involved in National and English language under different contexts and different communicate participants.

S2 Critical Thinking and Problem Solving (CPTS)

It is involved the ability of the person to think critically, creatively, analytically and ability to understand and knowledge into new different problems.

S3 Teamwork Skills (TS)

Involved the abilities of the person to work in a team with other people from various socio-cultural backgrounds to achieve same goal.

S4 Lifelong Learning and Information Management (LL)

Involved learning independently while gaining new skills and knowledges.

S5 Entrepreneurship Skills (ES)

The abilities to explore opportunities and develop risk awareness.

S6 Ethics and Moral Professional (EM)

The abilities to practice high moral standard in professional practice and social interaction.

S7 Leadership Skills (LS)

The abilities to practice leadership characteristic in real life.

These soft skills can be explored and developed through academic and extra-curricular activities. Therefore, this research was conducted to evaluate the soft skills development among UTHM students engaged in extra-curricular activities.

Method

In general, first year student in UTHM is compulsory to register in extra-curricular activities in order to complete their bachelor degrees studies; one (1) extra-curricular in semester one (1) and another extra-curricular in semester two (2). Extra-curricular listed in UTHM are categorize in seven (7) category which are public speaking, entrepreneurship, sports, community service, volunteerism, leadership, culture, initiative and innovation and literary liberal. However, this research only focusing on three extra-curricular which are public speaking, sports and volunteerism.

Six (6) respondent selected are two (2) SISPA students, two (2) PALAPES students and each one (1) from Rowing Club and Debate Club. Data were collected through question and answer method. Students were asked on their opinion on why they choose the selected extra-curricular, the

advantages and disadvantages of the engagement. Through this respond, relationship with the seven soft skills highlighted by MOHE can be analysed.

RESULT

Table 1 to **Table 4** shows the question that has been asked to the respondent on their engagement in extra-curricular. The table shows that, every respondent have their own answer. **Table 1** shows type of extra-curricular that respondent engaged with. Respondent 1 is from Debate Club and this club has won many competitions. Debate means talking about needs versus benefit. **Figure 1** shows debate club won a competition in 2016. Respondent 2 is from Rowing Club that in sports category. **Figure 2** shows the picture of rowing club. Volunteerisms are divided into nine (9) extra-curricular activities. SISPA and PALAPES were one of the extra-curricular under volunteerism. Therefore, Respondent 3 and 4 are from SISPA. Respondent 5 and 6 are from PALAPES. **Figure 3** shows SISPA students and **Figure 4** shows PALAPES students in their uniform.



Figure 1: Debate club



Figure 2: Rowing club



Figure 3: SISPA



Figure 4: PALAPES

Table 1: Type of extra-curricular activities

Question 1: What is the type of extra-curricular did you engaged?	
Respondent 1	Debate Club (Public Speaking)
Respondent 2	Rowing Club (Sports)
Respondent 3	SISPA (Volunteerism)
Respondent 4	SISPA (Volunteerism)
Respondent 5	PALAPES (Volunteerism)
Respondent 6	PALAPES (Volunteerism)

Table 2 shows the reason on why they choose the extra-curricular. Respondent 1 and 5 choose the extra-curricular because they active in that activities since secondary school. Therefore, when they continued study they choose to continue the extra-curricular. For respondent 2, choose the extra-curricular because of persuade of his friend, then interest grows as hobbies. Respondent 3 and 4 mentioned that, activities in SISPA were interesting that make them want to join SISPA. However, respondent 5 said that, she love to wear PALAPES uniform and that is the reason she engage with PALAPES.

Table 2: The reason of choosing the extra-curricular activities

Question 2: Why did you choose those extra-curricular activities?	
Respondent 1 (Public Speaking)	Active in public speaking from secondary school and always went to a competition.
Respondent 2 (Sports)	Initially the respondent joined the club due to friend persuasion but the fun keep growing and finally respondent get active in rowing activity.
Respondent 3 (Volunteerism)	Respondent like outdoor activities and during first SISPA presentation, respondent got interested and decide to join SISPA throughout the semester.
Respondent 4 (Volunteerism)	Respondent love training taught in SISPA such as firefighting, rescue and emergency rescue at high places. Thus, respondent want to be a young officer when completed his studies.
Respondent 5 (Volunteerism)	Respondent was active in PALAPES since secondary school.
Respondent 6 (Volunteerism)	Respondent admire people who wear uniform

Table 3 and **Table 4** show the advantages and disadvantages of student when engaged with extra-curricular. The advantages of the extra-curricular has been analysed to shows the relationship with MOHE soft skills. While the disadvantages gathered from respondent was based on respondent experience and observation from respondent friends. It shows that engagement with extra-curricular gave advantages that would develop students' soft skills and disadvantages that might cause tiredness and academic negligence.

Table 3: Advantages of the extra-curricular activities

Question 3: What are the advantages that you see from the extra-curricular activities?		MOHE soft skills
Respondent 1 (Public Speaking)	Respondent have confident level when speak in front of the class audience. Besides that, respondent learned how to manage time accordingly to make sure academic class was not negligence.	S1 S2 S6
Respondent 2 (Sports)	Respondent get many friends from other courses rather than having just only his classmate. Respondent can take care of his health. Networking with other people was improved.	S1 S3 S7
Respondent 3	Respondent felt more confident when doing	S1

(Volunteerism)	task that need to communicate with others. Respondent also can work under pressure when having a problem.	S2 S3, S7
Respondent 4 (Volunteerism)	Respondent always ready when there is disaster. He also can work in a team to handle any accident or disaster. Learned basic trauma life support that can be used when accident occur.	S1, S2 S3, S4 S6, S7
Respondent 5 (Volunteerism)	Respondent become a tough person when get into a trouble and solve the problem with a critical thinking. Besides that, he also learns how to manage time accordingly. Learned about how to defend him and country from attack.	S1 S2 S3 S7
Respondent 6 (Volunteerism)	Respondent know how to distribute the work to others and leadership skill improve than before. Become a professional person that can handle a task accordingly.	S1, S2 S3, S6 S7

Table 4: Disadvantages of the extra-curricular activities

Question 4: What are the disadvantages that you see from the extra-curricular activities?	
Respondent 1 (Public Speaking)	Sometimes need to skip academic classes to attend the competition.
Respondent 2 (Sports)	Tiredness can cause student to negligence their academic class. Hence the student would get lower grade.
Respondent 3 (Volunteerism)	Tiredness can cause the student to negligence their academic class. Hence the student would get lower grade.
Respondent 4 (Volunteerism)	The student that got too “fanatic” in their extra-curricular would only focus on it.
Respondent 5 (Volunteerism)	Student sometimes hard to handle.
Respondent 6 (Volunteerism)	Student can’t manage time.

Table 5 shows the relationship of extra-curricular activity with the soft skill required based on MOHE guideline. The soft skills are determined from answer given by respondent. The table shows that extra-curricular help to develop soft skills among the student. Volunteerism activity have the most soft skill achieved with six (6) out of seven (7) soft skill indicated from the interview result. The only soft skill that is not achieved is S5 which is entrepreneurship. This is because the volunteerism activities are more to make the student become tough, readiness, can solve problem when disaster happen, work under pressure, work as a team and also to be more discipline in their life. Other than that, student also got to learn knowledge that can be used for lifelong learning which are basic medic, how to respond when there are disaster and how to self-defence.

Public speaking is more to make the student on how to be confident to speak out the idea on their own way. It also makes the student become more professional when communicate with others. For sports, the soft skills that achieved are three (3) which are communication skills, teamwork skills and leadership skills. Other than that, sport extra-curricular also makes the student more aware about their health. This is because they need to be always energetic when there is competition. All of soft skills that have been suggested by the MOHE must have by each student and evaluated comprehensively.

Table 5: The relationship of extra-curricular with & soft skills selected by MOHE, 2006

Category of Activity	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Public Speaking	/	/				/	
Sports	/		/				/
Volunteerism	/	/	/	/		/	/

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study was aimed to highlight about the advantages/disadvantages of student engaged with extra-curricular. The respondents' interview shows that self-discipline of the students is important to make sure their academic not be negligence because of the extra-curricular. It is because the lack of soft skills seems to be hardship among university graduates. According to Ahmad (2013), graduates now are lacking in both technical knowledge and soft skill. Bernama (2014) reported that some university graduates are unemployed because lack soft skills that required by employers in the country. Other than that, a poor command in English language makes the graduates to be narrow-minded, lacking leadership, spirit de corps and unable to communicate well. Therefore it is important to keep developing human capital and foster intelligent and responsible global citizens is an important task that the university is entrusted with (Nikitina & Fruoka, 2014). Hence, clear vision is required; carefully calibrated basic education, cooperation and a sense of purpose various stakeholders, including university students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author would like to thank respondents for sharing their experience by engaged in extra-curricular.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad. 2013. "International Journal of Asian Social Science Soft Skills Level Of Malaysian Students At A Tertiary Institution : A Comparative Case Study Based On Gender , Area Of Residence And Type Of Schools." *International Journal of Asian Social Science Special* 3(9): 1929–37.

- BERNAMA. 2010. Dewan Rakyat: Current employment trend able to reduce graduate unemployment. Retrieved on 30th April 2014 from http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v3/news_
- Ismail, A., Abdullah, A., G., 2011. "Human Capital Development Practices in Malaysian Public Universities." *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences* 3(5): 389–98.
- Keow, Tang, Ngang Teerachai, and Nethanomsak Wallapha. "Development of Soft Skills : Transition from University to the Workplace in ASEAN Community Era." 2(August 2014): 1–23.
- Nikitina, Larisa. "Is Soft Skills Formation on University on University Student's Educational Agendas?" : 1–17.